



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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Fact Sheet

October 2000

Questions and Answers about Diabetes

Question: What is diabetes?

Answer: Diabetes is a disorder of carbohydrate metabolism in which the body has too little insulin and too much sugar. It tends to run in families. Diabetes is often marked by thirst, hunger, itching, weakness and loss of weight, among other symptoms. With proper treatment and lifestyle changes, many possible complications such as blindness, amputations, heart disease, kidney failure and premature death can be prevented or delayed.

Question: Why is VA concerned about diabetes?

Answer: The prevalence of diabetes among VA patients is substantially higher than in the general population. About 16 percent of VA patients have diabetes, as compared to six percent of the American public. The number of VA patients with diabetes is about 500,000. Three-fourths of the 5,900 lower-extremity amputations in VA in 1999 were performed on patients with diabetes.

Question: How will I know if I am at risk?

Answer: Almost 16 million Americans have diabetes, but one third of them are not aware of their condition. Diabetes is more common in Americans who are older, overweight, not physically active, have a family history of diabetes, are African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

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Question: If I am a veteran with diabetes, how can VA help me?

Answer: If you are enrolled in VA health care and have any risk factors or possible symptoms of diabetes, your physician will order a test of blood sugar level in your routine examination or upon request for an appointment. More than 93 percent of VA-enrolled veterans had that test in 1999. Also, if you are at risk of diabetes, VA physicians will see that you have eye exams, foot inspections and urine protein evaluations.

If you are found to have diabetes, your doctor will regularly have your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol tested to prevent serious complications. You can also expect to receive information about changing your diet or other activities to control your diabetes; VA's patient education programs are designed to help you manage your care. Your VA medical treatment will be based on your individual condition and your preferences.

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